PERCEPTION

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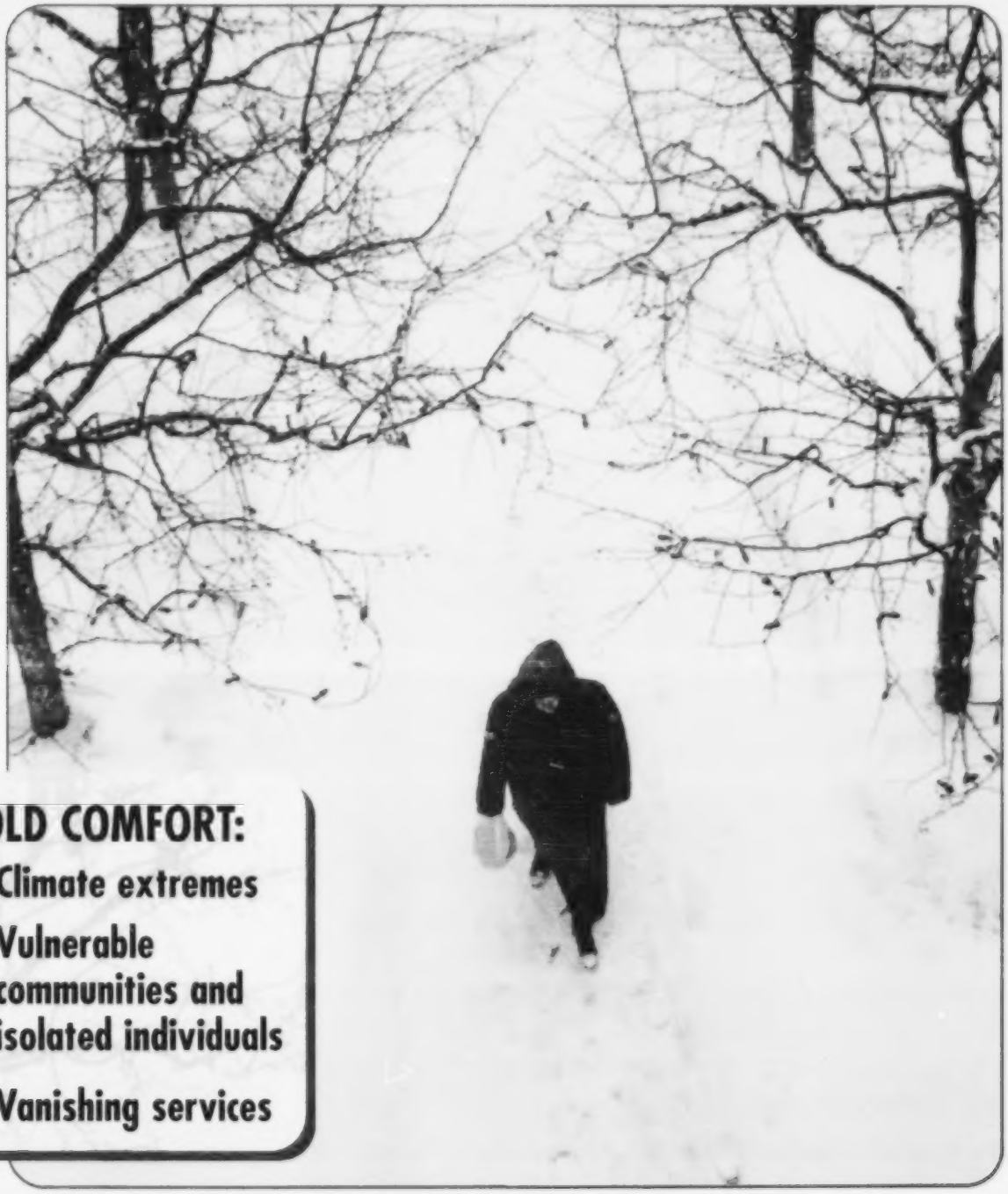

COLD COMFORT:

- Climate extremes
- Vulnerable communities and isolated individuals
- Vanishing services

PERCEPTION

Volume 28, No. 1 & 2, 2005

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Editorial

Hurricanes. Floods. Contaminated drinking water.

These are not things that most Canadians associate with their daily lives. But over the past year, a series of calamities and fears about insidious viral infections and spiralling energy costs have raised questions about how vulnerable we are – both as individuals and as a community.

These devastating events have also shown us what can happen when governments try to save money in the short term by cutting back on comprehensive planning and the people who put those plans into action.

It's a fact of life that some crises are unavoidable. But it is also a fact of life that skimping on a strong foundation is a recipe for disaster.

The costs to individuals – both physical and emotional – are staggering. The costs to communities are overwhelming. And the costs to governments wildly exceed what would have been spent by building a system that works.

Issues of vulnerability and security have been the focus of CCSD research since we released our first *Personal Security Index* in 1998. And it is clear that to most of us, security means a lot more than simply threats of terrorism.

In their day-to-day lives, Canadians feel secure when they have enough money to live on; when they are in good health and have access to health services; when they know there are safe and healthy places to care for and educate their children; when they know that help is available to care for their aging partners or parents.

That's the common thread running through the contributions in this Winter edition of *Perception*. The devastation that Hurricane Katrina wrought on the Gulf Coast dramatically illustrated how social and economic vulnerability can quickly become a life-and-death struggle under extreme conditions.

And extreme weather is becoming increasingly likely as a result of our environmental degradation of the planet. This highlights the critical importance of strong infrastructure – whether it's bricks and mortar, or skills and capacities.

In "Beyond Wishful Thinking," Gail Fawcett takes a look at how preparation can make all the difference, particularly for some of our most vulnerable citizens. With "A cautionary tale from Australia," Lynne Wannan describes what happens when a child care system is designed with insufficient attention to building infrastructure and with commercialization in the driver's seat.

Other articles in this issue of *Perception* include compelling first-person stories of youth in Canada who are valiantly facing racism and the perils of the inner city, as well as an overview of the increasing risks faced by all of Canada's youth. And to draw all these pieces together, we present a summary of the first paper in the CCSD's new Social Architecture series, *The World We Have*, by Katherine Scott.

In the Council's continuing commitment to profiling solutions – stepping stones to the world we want – we profile the extraordinary work being done both on-the-ground and in the policy planning process by one of our CCSD member organizations, St. Christopher House in Toronto.

And last but not least, to offer further food for thought and suggestions for action, we've also included an article by two Toronto Dominion Bank economists on policies for the working poor, plus an editorial on rebuilding social programs.

I hope you find this issue of *Perception* informative.

Peter Bleyer
CCSD President

Lessons from Katrina
– Preserving a civil society in the face of disaster

by Paul Kovacs

Trust is an essential foundation of civil society. Extreme events – like Hurricane Katrina – severely test the foundations of our modern society. During these extremes, we see evidence of the best and the worst behaviour. Through the study of such events, we can identify lessons to help prepare us for future perils. Canadians are vulnerable to climate extremes and we should learn from the recent experiences on the U.S. Gulf Coast and elsewhere to best realize the good and prevent the bad.

The research literature and the chaos in New Orleans confirm that those living on the margins are most vulnerable when disaster strikes. Health challenges, financial insecurity, family responsibility, abuse, illiteracy, frailty, disability and dependence increase the difficulty of living in the best of times, and they can threaten survival during extreme events. The affluent have the capacity to board up their homes and leave town when an evacuation order is issued, but the poor and the disabled need our support to preserve their safety. When aspects of our civil society break down – and this always happens to some extent during extreme events – an extraordinary burden falls on the most vulnerable. This was clearly broadcast on the television reports from New Orleans.

Some citizens rise to this challenge. Tens of thousands of volunteers are working today to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Millions of people around the world donated money and goods to support the rebuilding of communities wiped out by the South Asian tsunami. There have been remarkable stories of generous assistance to strangers in their time of need. The disaster research literature is full of positive stories about the compassion and altruism that is evident when disaster strikes.

The research literature is also full of warnings. Looting, neglect of the vulnerable, violence against women, suicide, exploitation and fraud, price gouging, and premature death among the elderly who seem to loose the will to live in the face of extremes are examples of where society should expect better.

> It is possible to prevent Nature's hazards from becoming human disasters.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that most disaster losses are preventable. We can and must do better to manage the risk of extremes. Through preparedness and investments in loss prevention, it is possible to prevent Nature's hazards from becoming human disasters. This task is becoming more important and urgent as natural disasters increase in frequency.

WHY ARE LOSSES RISING?

Three factors are contributing to the alarming international trend of rising damage from climate extremes: more people and property at risk, ageing infrastructure, and changes in the climate.

The world's population rises by 100 million each year. The number of people living in Vancouver – a region known to be vulnerable to earthquakes – doubled over the past 30 years, and property values have increased even faster. Similarly, coastal communities in Florida that are vulnerable to hurricane damage have more than doubled in population over the last 30 years, accompanied by massive investments in new homes and businesses.

Over the years, the public infrastructure that helps society cope with severe weather has been eroding with age and neglect. For

example, storm sewer systems in our major cities were put in place many decades ago. They were not designed to manage our current weather, and they will be further challenged by tomorrow's hazards. Public infrastructure repair and maintenance is often accorded a low priority when governments determine their spending plans because these systems are out of sight and less visible. Measured as a share of overall economic activity, Canadian spending on public infrastructure is currently less than half that of the 1950s and 1960s. It is estimated that more than $60 billion is needed to modernize Canada's municipal infrastructure. Similar trends are evident around the world.

And the climate has changed. There have been more extreme events, often with greater severity. More changes in the climate are coming, and more and larger extremes will occur. For Canadians, this will include more and larger flash floods, heat waves, wild fires, coastal flooding, and the like. The risk is rising that climate extremes will cause injury or damage.

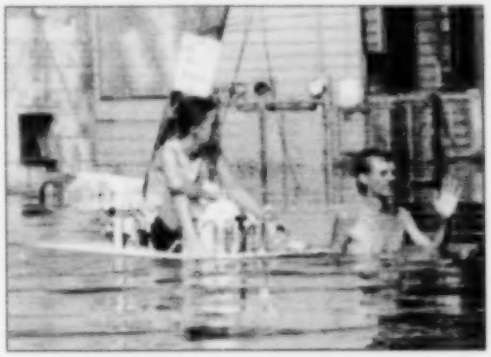
WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

During the 1990s, severe weather caused 650,000 fatalities, and disaster fatalities are expected to rise over the next decade. Although 90% of disaster fatalities occur in the developing world, the vast majority of property damage occurs in developed areas like North America, Europe and Japan.

Climate extremes caused a trillion dollars in economic losses during the 1990s. Losses have been doubling every five to seven years since the 1950s, and they are poised to more than double again this decade. For example, more than a quarter of small businesses fail to reopen if they are forced to close because of severe weather.

Canada's experience has been similar to that of other developed countries, with few and declining fatalities, and large and rising damage to property. Over the past 10 years, we have experienced the most costly storm in Canadian history (1998), the most costly wild fire (2003), the most costly hurricane (2003), and Ontario's most costly storm (2005). There have been few fatalities and injuries, but extensive damage to homes, businesses and infrastructure.

Early warning systems, building codes and safety knowledge are some of the factors which have contributed to the reduction in disaster fatalities and injuries in the United States, Japan and across Europe. Modern satellite and communications technologies can be used to warn people to evacuate before a major hazard strikes, thus reducing the threat of fatalities and injuries. But vulnerable populations will have more trouble evacuating – and the homes and buildings remain to confront the storm.



HOW DO WE PREVENT DISASTERS?

More hazards do not necessarily mean that there must be more disasters. We cannot prevent a storm from striking, but we should take action so that we can prevent a storm from causing fatalities and damage, thereby preventing the hazard from becoming a disaster.

We can build disaster-resilient communities through local action. Individuals, businesses and local organizations need to become informed about the perils in their community. Hazard knowledge is a foundation of preparedness and loss prevention. What perils could injure your family? What precautions should be taken *before* the threat strikes? What are the safest actions to take during an event? What should you do right after the hazard passes? These efforts should focus on your family, school, work and community organizations. Personal preparedness and knowledge are the most powerful tools to reduce the risk of loss.

Preparedness efforts are the ideal time to focus on society's most vulnerable populations. Plan

to ensure that your family is safe and also to check on neighbours, starting with those with special needs. Network with friends and neighbours to coordinate these efforts. Planning during good weather will bring greater calm and clarity of thought when trouble does strike.

The trust in our civil society also requires that our support systems work. We must press our governments to build schools that will protect our children from earthquakes and storms, install storm sewers that can carry heavy rains away from our homes and businesses, design road systems that are safe during extremes, enforce building codes for the construction of safe homes and buildings, and maintain power systems that are resilient to storm damage. The science of building disaster-resilient public infrastructure is well known, but citizens must press governments to ensure that this is a priority.

Almost 10 years ago I founded the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction to promote disaster safety research and outreach. From our base at the University of Western Ontario, more than 50 scientists in universities across Canada participate in our research network studying disaster resilience. The team includes members with training in engineering, climatology, hydrology, seismology, economics, geography, political science, health, and business. We have established links with organizations in the United States, Japan and Europe, and with national organizations in the private sector, government and voluntary sectors. The combination of natural science, behavioural and policy research contributes to knowledge development with widespread potential.

Some early outreach programs focus on retrofitting homes to improve resilience to extremes, best practices for the construction of new homes, safety for child care centres, and continuity planning for small business. The policy research has been reflected in the modernization of emergency management legislation in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. The insurance, construction and emergency management industries are applying aspects of our research to improve their business practices and consumer outreach activities. But we have only begun, and much more needs to be done.

Our most vulnerable citizens carry most of the burden of disaster, but a caring society can reduce this risk.

Three lessons for Canada from Hurricane Katrina include the following. First, heed scientific warnings of impending peril. They were frequently issued for New Orleans and have been in a number of Canadian communities, but we need to take action now, before disaster strikes. Second, our most vulnerable citizens carry most of the burden of disaster, but a caring society can reduce this risk through preparedness and investments in loss prevention. Third, hazards do not need to become disasters – an investment of $10 to $14 billion in protective infrastructure for New Orleans could have prevented the more than $100 billion in damage that occurred.

Trust is a foundation of civil society. The tragic losses in New Orleans exposed the vulnerability of people in that city, and of people elsewhere around the globe, to extreme events. The people of New Orleans could not trust that their public infrastructure would keep Katrina's flood waters from pouring into the city, and the community networks could not be trusted to provide a safe environment in which to survive and rebuild.

Canadians are questioning our own preparedness and resilience to extremes. I hope the greatest lesson from Katrina will be a society more aware of the importance of preparedness, more aware of our duty to protect our most vulnerable citizens, and a society which becomes engaged in actions to ensure the safety of our families and neighbours.

Paul Kovacs is Executive Director of the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction and an Adjunct Research Professor in Economics at the University of Western Ontario.

Beyond wishful thinking:
Emergency planning for persons with disabilities

by Gail Fawcett

During the past year, Canadians have watched with horror as nature has unleashed a series of disasters upon various locations around the world – tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding. The sheer number and scope of these disasters have captured our imagination and stirred our fears. Recent acts of terrorism and memories of 9/11 also keep us ever mindful of the need to be vigilant. As if this all weren't enough, the spectre of a world-wide pandemic of avian influenza increasingly haunts us. It may turn out that the SARS crisis of 2003 was merely a "warm up exercise" for the greatest threat to our existence since the Spanish Influenza of 1918.

While Canadians continue to rise to the challenge of fundraising to help victims around the world, questions concerning our own capacity to deal with large-scale disasters abound. Are *we* ready? A recent online article in CBC Unlocked ("Canada Incapable of Evacuating its Large Cities" by Yanick Dumont Baron, September 2005) noted that large Canadian cities do not have well-developed evacuation plans.

This absence of clear plans is particularly worrisome for the most vulnerable among us – and there may be no more vulnerable a population than people with disabilities. News stories from disasters around the world depict chaos and survival of the fittest. Where would persons with disabilities fit into a Canadian disaster scenario?

About three-quarters of a million adults with disabilities in Canada already have some type of unmet need for support with their daily activities. If our present support structures cannot meet their needs at the best of times, what can we expect at the worst of times?

Our cities and towns need to look seriously at their disaster plans, and ask themselves whether they really have a workable plan in place for people with disabilities. Do they have adequate personnel assigned to provide assistance to those who would need it in a time of crisis? Are these individuals properly trained? Are the plans viable?

To begin with, they need to look at the realities of people with disabilities.

If our present support structures cannot meet their needs at the best of times, what can we expect at the worst of times?

Certain segments of the disabled population – such as seniors with disabilities and those requiring care in long-term care facilities or group homes – may be more likely to live in close quarters with many other people. This type of living arrangement could be both positive and negative in time of disaster. In the event of a pandemic, it could mean a higher potential for infection. In the event of an extreme weather event of some sort, one imagines that these facilities would follow an established evacuation plan. However, the recent drowning deaths of nursing home residents in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina remind us to take nothing for granted.

Another segment of the disabled population is more likely to live alone and may be quite isolated. Persons with disabilities are more likely to report having fewer close friends and relatives than persons without disabilities: over 46% report having fewer than five close friends or relatives. While this may make them less likely to come into contact with infections, it can pose enormous challenges for dealing with a range of other disasters.

But the disaster plans of a number of municipalities across Canada, according to their websites, do not take this reality into account. They make the assumption that persons with disabilities have access to a network of individuals

who can be relied upon to help them in times of crisis. From the dramas we have seen played out around the world, we must ask whether it is realistic to rely on assistance from individuals who, if they are living close enough to be of help, will likely be scrambling to save themselves.

What strategies will be used to communicate plans for disaster relief to those who have a hearing or seeing disability?

Identifying individuals with disabilities who would have difficulty in an emergency is important to any city's disaster plan. It is also important to develop a registry of needs – and to ensure that this information is conveyed to those who will need it. The Canadian Council of the Blind tells the story of an individual in southern Ontario who called 911 for assistance during the blackout of 2003. Only after firefighters had climbed 23 flights of stairs did they discover that the individual was in a wheelchair. The firefighters had to return to their truck to bring back special equipment to bring this person safely down the stairs.

Individuals with serious mobility disabilities have obvious challenges in the event of floods, bombs, fires, earthquakes, and extreme weather conditions. Advance preparations can mean everything for people in this situation. We know that, in the case of the 9/11 attacks, the presence of Evac+Chairs in the World Trade Towers saved the lives of several individuals in wheelchairs. However, it is important to remember that you must have people trained and ready to assist with the use of many of these devices for them to be effective. Life-saving technologies still require a good plan and clear communications.

In the United States, a survey done by the National Organization on Disabilities indicated that nearly three-fifths of persons with disabilities said they did not know who to contact regarding emergency plans if a disaster should strike their community. As well, half of persons with disabilities who were employed reported that their workplace had made no plans to safely evacuate them in the event of an emergency.

During a disaster, it will be difficult enough to communicate plans to the general public. Certain disabilities pose an enormous challenge when dealing with this type of emergency communications. For instance, what strategies will be used to communicate plans for disaster relief to those who have a hearing or seeing disability? Persons who are deaf-blind pose an even greater communications challenge. Persons with an intellectual disability or mental disability may also be difficult to reach and coping with the disaster may pose even greater challenges for them. The need for plain language is essential when communicating information about disaster relief.

We must also think about the aftermath of a disaster. The loss of supports can be devastating for some persons with disabilities. For many, there is no "one-stop shopping" for all the supports they require. Our Canadian system of supports for persons with disabilities – whether they are income supports, the provision of aids or devices, medication, or supports with daily activities – has often been referred to as a "patch-work quilt." For many individuals, their support system has been carefully put together over time. Re-establishing these supports would not be easy in an environment that is in recovery mode. While we often hear about the difficulties faced by disaster victims in obtaining basic documentation like birth certificates and driver's licences, the situation faced by many persons with disabilities would likely be much more complex. This is all the more reason for some type of streamlining of our system of supports for persons with disabilities.

We take comfort in stories of heroism where individuals went out of their way to assist persons with disabilities, and we shudder with other reports about survival of the fittest. But we cannot leave the welfare of people with disabilities to chance. A time of crisis is not a good time to begin developing community capacity. Let's not wait until our nerves are strained and our brains pushed to the limit. Let's plan now, and educate and assign responsibilities now, while we can.

Gail Fawcett is a Senior Research Associate at the CCSD and author of the Council's Disability Research Information sheets.

Why must chronic illness mean poverty and isolation?

by Michel Martin

Only two months after turning 40, I contracted a rare illness called Goodpasture's Syndrome. This illness causes the immune system to reject the lungs and kidneys. Until recently, it was fatal.

I was fortunate. Anti-rejection drugs allowed me to escape with my lungs damaged but still functioning. However, my kidneys no longer work so I need dialysis to live. Persistent fatigue and continual episodes of illness forced me to stop work 12 years ago.

Now I survive with a disability pension of less than $900 per month from the Quebec Pension Plan. It's not much, but it could be worse. About $2,000 per month in medications is covered under Quebec's drug plan, and I live in social housing which provides both good quality and affordable shelter.

How do other Canadians manage to live if they have the misfortune to be ill, poor, or elderly?

I live frugally and budget assiduously. Even at that, buying a small item sometimes requires a month or more of juggling priorities. A night on the town, a modest restaurant meal, or buying a gift for someone is next to impossible. My social life depends on the active support of friends and family. Usually, I just stay in my apartment, since going anywhere costs money I don't have.

Unfortunately, many chronically ill, poor, or elderly Canadians are in the same – or worse – straits. What's stopping Canadian governments from providing adequately for the poor?

It would cost too much, some argue. I disagree. I think that increased income supports for the poor would, in fact, generate more local economic activity, which is important to small businesses. And if it were done on a national scale, I believe that it would contribute to significant activity in all sectors. Poor people have so little income, they tend to spend it on necessities.

Another rationale against increasing income supports for the poor is that it would create a disincentive to work. That's patently foolish. Who would want to leave their salaried work to live on such a meagre amount?

The fear of disincentive arises because the minimum wage is so low. If we adjusted the minimum wage from the late 1960s of $1 per hour to its present buying value, it would be $15 an hour – significantly higher than the $7 to $8 an hour minimum wage in most parts of the country. If minimum wages were higher, disability pensions and welfare could also be higher.

There always has been and always will be resistance to spending money on welfare supports and services. In the prosperous 1960s, there was strong opposition to Pearson's Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). Now, in the prosperous early years of the 21st Century, there is little enthusiasm for filling the big hole that was blasted into the federal social transfers in the mid-90s. But without the CAP, even welfare at its present levels would not have been possible – and without replenishing the present Canada Social Transfer, we will be unable to provide adequate support for the vulnerable members of our society.

Raising income supports for certain vulnerable populations is more than just a matter of charity. It's also a question of preparing for our own future. Each of us will grow old and many will become chronically ill. It may happen in your 40s, as it did to me, or you may be luckier and it won't happen until you are 50, 60, 70, or even 80. But it will happen. And when it does, I will welcome you to the fold. I hope by then, however, that Canada will have progressed as a socially responsible society so that your chronic illness will not be equated with isolation and poverty.

Michel Martin is a former freelance journalist. He lives in Hull, Quebec, and writes so that he doesn't go crazy from ill health, poverty, and social isolation.

A Cautionary Tale from Australia

Over the past two decades, Australian child care expert Lynne Wannan witnessed the impact of large-scale for-profit early chilhood education (ECE) facilities in her own country. With help from the Canadian Child Care Advocacy Association, she embarked on a three-week tour of Canada in October 2005 to share lessons from Down Under.

The CCSD sponsored her concluding talk in a briefing session on October 20 at the National Press Club in Ottawa. During that session, Wannan shared both cautionary tales from Australia and her impressions of the Canadian child care situation. She also answered questions about pay scales for child care workers and culturally appropriate child care for Aboriginal children.

The session was timely. Just a month later, controversy exploded in Quebec over the increasing presence of commercial child care chains in what has been seen as a model in provincial child care systems. Then child care – and in particular, the idea of funding parents rather than a system – became a major election issue.

Following is an excerpt from the CCSD Briefing Session. A fuller report on the session can be found on the CCSD's website at www.ccsd.ca.

LYNNE WANNAN:

My dominant concern has been the transformation of child care into a profit-making industry.

In Australia before 1991, we had a predominantly not-for-profit, publicly owned child care infrastructure. And we had a national plan to develop a quality, universal, affordable, accessible system. We described what we wanted in much the same way you do.

The federal government gave priority to communities most in need of support. Child care received capital funds from our government, and centres were almost always built on government land. Child care was non-profit, and was really a public facility with a parent management committee. My role was to facilitate proposals for child care in low-income and disadvantaged communities.

Then in 1991, the Labour Party a – "progressive government" – opened up funding to the for-profit sector. The arguments they gave for doing so are the same ones you are hearing now: families must have choice; it's not fair for families who are accessing non-profit service to get the federal subsidy, while those using private child care do not; the market can better deliver higher quality child care at a lower price; and so on.

In fact, none of those economic rationalists' goals have been achieved. The results have been the opposite of what the government was striving for.

After 1991, a four-year allocation of funds for children's services disappeared within the first year. The community-based sector had warned the government that if they didn't put in some controls, that was going to happen. For a business, getting somewhere around 60% of revenue guaranteed from the government is pretty attractive.

Once commercial services started to open up, the competition became ruthless.

The for-profit child cares were allowed to open services wherever they wanted. Services were established where they knew existing services were doing pretty well, where there was a market, where you could run a good business. One state with a lovely warm climate became a hub of child care delivery because retirees with pensions who were living in the area invested in child care.

The funding was no longer going to the service, but to the parent – I know that's an issue here in Canada, too. Of course, that was based on giving parents the choice, and parental choice was supposed to determine how the service system developed. But parents can't really control *where* a service goes, they can only purchase a service if it's there. The notion that they are going to influence

the market, I think, is a bit of nonsense. To this day, we still have more demand than supply.

Because so many services opened up in areas where there were already lots of other services, working parents no longer got priority. I don't have a problem with non-working parents accepting child care. I think child care should be universal and that it's really important to support developmental opportunities for all children. But nevertheless, you've got to have priorities.

There were predatory pricing practices: smaller providers were squeezed out.

Once commercial services started to open up, the competition became ruthless. Before, child care had been a very cooperative sector. The commercial sector had been made up of small companies and the biggest child care centre probably only had about 60 kids. It was perhaps a bit like you have in Canada today. This new competition was something we had never seen before. There were predatory pricing practices: smaller providers were squeezed out because some of the bigger companies coming in could survive for a couple of years without making any money. That way, they could get rid of the competition and have the market to themselves.

Today more than 70% of our sector is commercially owned, whereas it was 85% non-profit back in 1991. And 25% of our provision is with one shareholder company. We only began getting shareholder child care companies on the stock market in 2000, so it has quite a short history. And to move to 25% control of the sector in that short a time is pretty amazing.

When you are publicly listed on the stock market, your prime responsibility is to make profits – that's the law. You have to generate profits to distribute to your shareholders. You have to compete and grow in order to increase shareholder profits.

It's not that easy to make tons of money from any one child care centre. But a centre with about 100 places, within one of those big companies, makes about $100,000 a year. They make about $1,000 per place, per year. And to increase its value, the corporation has to keep taking over other companies and consolidating the market. They will close down local services in order to have one bigger centre that can be really full and viable.

We no longer have a child care system in Australia that is part of our local community, integrated with existing services, and aimed at supporting families and serving children. It's an industry now that is striving to make a profit.

Another way of making a profit is to reduce costs. The large child care companies spend 50% on staff – and aim to spend less – whereas small commercial centres spend about 60% on staff, and non-profits spend 80-85%. The large companies claim to be more efficient and to reduce costs by centralizing administration. In fact, the non-profits are spending the smallest component on administration – roughly 15%.

So you'd think we'd have really cheap child care in Australia, thanks to all those shareholder companies. But actually, the cost of child care in those companies is comparable to the cost of child care in the not-for-profit sector. Sometimes it's even more expensive. In a wealthy inner-city area they can charge – you'll be shocked when I say this – $100 per day.

Privatization certainly hasn't made our child care cheaper.

So that's $500 a week for child care. For most of our services, the average fee across the country is $220. But that's pulled down by some low-cost services. You'd be hard pressed to find child care in Australia now for less than $280 or $300 a week. So privatization certainly hasn't made our child care cheaper.

It's been shocking to me to discover how low the child care wages are in Canada. Ours are not great, but yours I think are really worrisome. Poverty must be a major issue for your child care community; I don't know how they even live. It's a lesson for Australia, because we're moving to a similar industrial relations environment as yours, and from what I've seen here, I'm very scared about that.

Lynne Wannan has been an advisor to Australian governments at both the state and national levels, and she has worked with all the players in the children's services sector. She is a member of the National Children's Services Reference Group, which advises the Australian Minister for Children, and she is chair of the National Association of Community-Based Children's Services of Australia.

The Progress of Canada's Children and Youth 2006

In early 2006, the CCSD will publish *The Progress of Canada's Children and Youth*. This will be the seventh edition of *Progress*, a series which provides a thorough and comprehensive study of the well-being of Canadian children and youth. Drawing on a wide variety of indicators, *Progress* tracks underlying social conditions such as family life and economic security. It paints a detailed a portrait of the health, education, social engagement, and labour market experiences of children and youth.

Louise Hanvey is the principle researcher and writer of the 2006 report. As an experienced researcher and seasoned public health nurse, her work shows a concern for the lived realities of children and youth.

This unique publication tells its story through a combination of text, graphs and charts. *Progress* also features the stories of individual Canadian children and youth.

Following are two stories of youth which will be published in *The Progress of Children and Youth 2006* in condensed form. Through the words of an Aboriginal teenager engaged in community activism in Winnipeg, and a high school student juggling her West African heritage with her Canadian reality in Ottawa, they reflect some of the contemporary challenges faced by Canadian youth.

Battling Stereotypes

As one of just a few black students in a suburban Ottawa school with more than 2,000 students, 15-year-old Nana battles stereotypes with grace and humour.

"There's one black student who plays up to the rapper-guy image. But I've been around a lot of other black students, when I was in Detroit. I don't feel there's one particular way I have to act."

Born in the United States of West African parents, Nana's sudden move at the age of eight from a racially mixed neighbourhood to a sea of white is one reason why she still dreams of returning to America for university.

A top student, Nana is thinking seriously of studying to be a doctor. At school, she has only had trouble with one teacher, who had the class study *Of Mice and Men* for Grade 9 English.

"She referred to this one black character with the 'N' word a lot, even though he had a name. And she presented it like racism existed back in the 1930s, but there was no racism anymore."

Nana and her friends were outraged. She talked over the situation with her mother, but decided not to raise it with the teacher for fear of losing marks. Nana lost marks anyway: when she handed in a poster project featuring pictures of civil rights activists, the teacher told her that it didn't have a message, despite the fact that it was entitled "the fight against racism."

"I only got 77 in that class. It brought down my average," she says.

She laughs about it now, but she is keeping a close watch on her younger brother, who is now studying that same book, with the same teacher.

take on as the eldest daughter. "I cook dinner and do a lot of cleaning. I also take care of my little brother. It's like a full-time job in the summer," she says.

"I don't disagree that a girl should be able to do those things. But I feel I should be

"Not all black people are rappers or video hosts, and racism still does exist."

appreciated for it. My other friends who do chores get an allowance, but I don't. And I have friends who have never washed a dish in their lives."

"Teachers, and people generally, just need to be more informed in terms of realistic things," she says. "Not all black people are rappers or video hosts, and racism still *does* exist."

Her parents are proud of Nana's high marks, but not so keen on her idea of returning to the United States to study. "Mum is really against student loans. That's why she says I have to stay here."

So Nana is trying even harder at school, aiming for scholarships that will cover her costs.

She feels, however, that she should be allowed to spend her babysitting money, rather than save it for the future, as her parents advise. She wishes she could take a break from school by going out to shop or see a movie at the mall with her friends. But so far she is waging a losing battle with her parents' many objections.

"They don't let me go anywhere or do anything," says Nana. "They say 'what if your friends did something wrong? You would be the one who gets into trouble.' They say 'look at yourself in the mirror. You stand out.' "

Their perspective seems strange to Nana, who is more aware of similarities than differences with her friends and her community.

There are other aspects of her family life which set her apart, like the chores she is expected to

Nana sees her parents' attitudes as echoes of West African traditions and attitudes, which are foreign to her as an American-born child. "My friends don't like it when I say I'm not really from Africa, but I don't feel like I'm from there because I've never been there."

Nana has, however, discovered that the culture is something her mother is willing to indulge her in, at least a little. "We had free tickets to this Ghanaian concert. We weren't going to go but then I said it would be a waste, so we should go. I got to go with my Mum and it was great."

THE CCSD HAS MOVED!

Our new address is **190 O'Connor Street, Suite 100, Ottawa, ON K2P 2R3,** but our phone, fax, e-mail and website addresses remain the same.

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Changing from within

Joey first went to the Community Action program at his high school with a bunch of friends, "just to skip class." Now he is the proud recipient of the Manitoba Aboriginal Achievement Award for his performance in the program.

What happened? "I really got into it," he says.

The program at RB Russell Vocational High School in Winnipeg engages students in creating interactive workshops which tackle issues Joey is all too familiar with.

"It's hard to walk around the North End without looking over your shoulder," he says. "Some of the topics they came up with – drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, FAS, gambling – I'd seen them at first-hand."

This is the same neighbourhood where an 11-year-old girl took her own life after being bullied and allegedly witnessing police mistreatment of her father. It is the area that is making Winnipeg known as the "murder capital" of Canada.

But it is also home to this outstanding project, whose creator and director, Jay Willman, was recently honoured with the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence. Joey's enthusiasm for the project is clear. "We all work together, we brainstorm ideas and realities. It's pretty amazing how fast we come up with plays – everyone's in the zone," he says. He pauses to consider some examples: "A play about someone walking into a store and being followed around by a clerk because of assumptions they are making, or one about bullying. We've done so many, it's unbelievable."

The drama group draws additional ideas from a far-flung network built up over the program's 15 years of existence. "People call us and give us a topic," he says. "We've had people call us from reserves and towns."

The group has presented its dramatic workshops in five different provinces, to thousands of workshop participants. They dramatically present the problem, draw the audience into role-playing, break them into small groups for discussions, and engage them in addressing the issues raised.

"The workshops definitely help people cope with their realities," says Joey. He offers the example of a workshop on domestic violence. "For some people, it happens so often, they think it's just another day. When we do a workshop, it makes them think about things they can do about it, and what their options are."

When the group performs in schools, their youth gives them an edge, he says. "Nowadays, kids don't want to listen to adults, they want to listen to teenagers."

> **"This whole project has made me a better person."**

The troupe often give school workshops on bullying, staying in school, and addictions. Their diabetes workshop ran extensively in Winnipeg schools, with simple messages like "eat healthy and stay active, rather than go out and get chips and pop" – and won Joey and the troupe the Manitoba Aboriginal Achievement award.

Jay Willman says crime has a profound effect on youth in the school's neighbourhood, the poorest urban riding in all of Canada. "Crime in the neighbourhood often involves family members, friends, and the youth themselves," says Willman. "It affects all of us."

Fear of crime in the neighbourhood stops youth from living full lives, he says. "One of the consequences of crime is that youth often feel insecure about the safety of their streets, making it hard to come and go to positive activities such as sports clubs and cultural activities."

The Community Action Program tries to fill some of those gaps. "The core strategy is youth empowerment through leadership development, community interaction, and theatrical experience," says Willman. "The youth are often recognized as a resource in their community, especially when we do a series of high-profile workshops. Some even get asked for autographs!"

The program has about 60 participants at any one time, with 20 or so forming the core troupe.

Clearly, Joey has gotten a lot out of the program. Ambivalent about school when he started the Community Action Program, Joey says it got him interested in writing, in English – and in finishing high school, which he expects to do this year.

Now he has ambitions of starting up the same program at the University of Winnipeg. "This whole project has made me a better person," he says simply.

Creating safe & supportive environments for young Canadians

by Pam Jolliffe

In Canada, we tend to believe that most children and youth in our communities are doing well. But we live in a world that is increasingly complex, fast-paced, and uncertain. A recent government study[1] found that fully one-quarter of Canadian children and youth are experiencing serious challenges. As a society, we must recognize the depth of children's vulnerability in their middle and teenaged years and address those challenges.

All children and youth have the potential to be vulnerable at some point during their childhood or adolescent years. They are more sensitive than adults to conditions in their social and physical environments, and there is no socio-economic threshold above which all children do well.

Increasing numbers of young people today are experiencing – or at risk of – significant physical and mental health problems. Chronic childhood diseases are also on the rise.[2] We must understand the challenges facing our children and youth, look at the solutions available, and invest in them.

Given the number of lone-parent families and two-working-parent families, the number of children who are without family supervision, particularly during after-school hours, is growing. Many "latchkey" children experience loneliness, fear and worry while they are home alone. They are also at greater risk of injury, victimization, poor nutrition, the negative impact of excessive television viewing and unmonitored Internet use, and a lack of physical exercise and social engagement.

Many children and youth simply lack the material support they need. Despite a growing economy, more than one million children in Canada – nearly one child in six – still lives in poverty. Meanwhile, youth must pay exorbitant fees for their higher education, and they have the highest unemployment rate of any age group. In fact, youth who are employed make up over half of all workers earning low wages.

When troubled, children and youth tend to lash out at others. An alarming 15% of Canadian children report having bullied other children more than twice during a school term. And approximately 23% of Canadian youth in Grades 6 to 10 say they have been bullied by others.

Research has shown that adequate income, effective parenting, and supportive community environments are the three enabling conditions necessary for children to achieve positive outcomes.[3] Families and schools play key roles in assuring those conditions, but neighbourhoods have an important role to play as well. In these times of social change and family fragmentation, supportive communities become all the more important. In particular, community resources which provide services in the areas of health, social support, and recreation contribute significantly to young people's well-being. They help create safe and secure places, and provide opportunities for children to be healthy, happy and productive.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada are one of the community organizations which help create supportive environments. Our experience shows that there *are* effective solutions to the pressing issues of poor physical and mental health, anti-social behaviour, and youth violence. When children and youth have somewhere safe and supportive to go, places where they can engage in meaningful activities and develop positive relationships with adult role models, their vulnerability is reduced.

BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OF CANADA

- run 104 clubs in 700 community locations across Canada;
- serve 154,000 young people and their families each year;
- provide safe, supportive places where children and youth can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers, build positive relationships, and develop confidence and skills for life;
- offer programs which are relevant and accessible to all children and youth, such as programs in physical recreation, technology, the arts, personal growth, nutrition, and more;
- may also provide meals, family support programs, emergency shelter, and other supports to children and youth at risk;
- offer fun, challenging experiences and opportunities that teach children and youth about the importance of healthy living, personal growth, learning, and community involvement;
- take a preventative approach to tackling a broad range of critical issues facing young people today, including health, education, youth employment, youth violence, substance abuse, and youth sexuality;
- have been helping young Canadians to discover, develop and achieve their potential, for over 100 years.

Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada
Clubs Garçons & Filles du Canada

These clubs offer a continuum of services, making it possible for children to be active club members from a very young age, right through to young adulthood. As a result, children and youth develop positive and lasting relationships with caring adult role models. The clubs also foster a sense of belonging and focus on building self-esteem and skills that can benefit a young person for life. This approach – like that of many other youth-serving organizations – promotes prevention by making connections between the assets in a young person's social environments – their families, peers, communities, schools – and their behaviour and health status – feelings of self-worth, tobacco and drug use, physical activity, nutrition, and the like.

Children and youth tell us how important it is for them to have supportive people, places and programs outside of school hours. Their participation and success in these kinds of programs confirm the positive difference they make in young lives. Children and youth will also communicate their frustration and disappointment when great programs disappear for lack of funding. And these days, funding uncertainty and a shortage of sustainable programs are having a negative impact on young people.

Unfortunately, there is no overarching framework or committed investments to ensure the continuity of community programs for youth. In too many communities today, there are insufficient supports for young people to feel safe and secure, and few if any places for them to go to engage in meaningful activities and have fun in safe and positive ways. And we know from experience that when alternatives are not available, many young people will spend their time in empty homes, in malls, or hanging out on the streets.

There is an obvious need for social policies that are accountable for improving outcomes for children aged 6 to 12 and youth aged 13 to 18. I believe that investing in a social infrastructure in Canada – one which sustains and builds on the capacities of child and youth-serving organizations – is a key way to address the vulnerability of our young people. In order for them to have the best possible opportunities to become healthy adults and lead productive lives, we must make a committed investment in their families, their schools and their communities. Given what we know about the vulnerability of children and the importance of supportive environments, it is essential that as a society, we make the necessary commitment.

Pam Jolliffe is the National Executive Director of Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada. For more information on the organization, visit their website at www.bgccan.com.

[1] Child and Adolescent Development Task Group, Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health and Health Security. *Middle Childhood: Taking Action Together*, 2004.

[2] Ibid

[3] S.M. Stroick and J. Jenson. *What is the Best Policy Mix for Canada's Young Children?* Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Network, 1999.

St. Christopher House – A dynamo of social change

St Christopher House in Toronto is one of 175 organizational members of the CCSD across Canada. The agency became a member in 1986, at about the same time as it became more involved in social policy.

"We value our membership in CCSD because it allows us to keep on top of emerging ideas about social policy across the country," says Susan Pigott, Chief Executive Officer of St. Christopher House.

Following is an account of St Christopher House's important social service work in Toronto, and its increasing involvement in fostering improvements to social policies. For more information about St. Christopher House, visit their website at www.stchrishouse.org.

St. Christopher House assists vulnerable people of all ages and cultures in the varied world of downtown Toronto. Seven sites throughout the colourful West End offer everything from programs for the elderly, literacy and children's programs, settlement services,
drop-in services for homeless people, and employment preparation services for youth. In all, 20 programs serve approximately 12,000 mostly low-income members of the community each year.

But what really makes the agency stand out is its increasing role in the development of effective social policies – and the education of their clients in making the best of existing policies.

"Income security issues don't have local solutions – they have provincial and federal solutions," explains St. Christopher House CEO Susan Pigott.

Started in 1912, St. Christopher House has a long history of commitment to social change and to service delivery. In the early 1990s, the agency's board made a far-sighted decision to invest in community development and set up the Community Response and Advocacy Unit (CRA). In the ensuing years, this Unit has become central to the operations of the House. It supports the community development and social change work of all St. Christopher House programs and provides a focal point for creative thinking around social change.

"When funding was cut to co-ordinating bodies and planning organizations in the late 1990s, we realized that we were going to have to take on more systemic issues ourselves," says Pigott. St. Christopher House's first policy coup was to obtain funding from the Atkinson Charitable Foundation to bring an on-site policy analyst to the centre. For six weeks in 2000, former CCSD researcher Richard Shillington, a statistician and policy analyst, worked as a member of St. Chris' staff team. "This was the first opportunity I had, after 25 years as a social policy expert, of actually meeting people living on low income," he says.

The combination proved to be very powerful. After meeting some low-income seniors who clearly qualified for the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) – but were not receiving it – Shillington did a little more research. He found that 300,000 seniors across the country were in the same boat. "We arranged a flurry of meetings with government representatives, then made several attempts to interest the media," said Shillington. As well, St. Christopher House communicated the problem to the federal government and began raising the issue with their partners at every

opportunity. Then, on a slow news day in late August, a food bank representative at a press conference mentioned the plight of these seniors and within hours, the story was on the front page of the *Toronto Star*, and within a day it had caught the attention of the national media.

In response, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) developed an outreach campaign to let eligible seniors know about the availability of the GIS supplement.

For St. Chris, this experience confirmed the importance of having frontline agencies and the people they work with involved in the development of social policies and programs. And so the Community Undertaking Social Policy Program (CUSP) was established. "We realized that frontline agencies have an important role to play in directly linking public policy with the lived experience of people who are at the receiving end of those policies and programs," says Pigott. "In the case of tax credits and refunds, there are far too many people who do not know that these are now administered through the tax system and so may not be attentive to their entitlements." According to Shillington, there are as many children not getting the child tax benefit supplement as there had been seniors not getting the GIS (300,000) – and despite HRDC's awareness campaign, there are still tens of thousands of eligible seniors who are not getting the GIS.

Beyond this particular problem, however, there are many other ways in which the tangle of policies and programs can be self-defeating for those on the receiving end. "Often the perverse effects of well-intended programs come as a result of the ways in which they interact – and this can only be seen by the person who actually experiences them," says Shillington.

St. Christopher House has stepped in to plug holes wherever they can. For example, their pioneering Financial Advocacy and Problem-Solving program now offers year-round help to those trying to navigate the increasingly complex worlds of financial services and tax policy. Last year, the program helped low-income earners recoup over $1 million in tax refunds – an average of $1,3000 per household.

"A common theme in all these initiatives is more money in peoples' pockets," says Pigott.

The second CUSP policy expert at St. Chris was John Stapleton, recently retired as an income security expert with the Ontario Provincial Government. While John was at St. Chris in 2004, he worked with staff, volunteers and community members to develop an alternative to the Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) for low-income folks. Like many other financial products designed for middle-class people, RRSPs are not always helpful for those living on low incomes. The Registered Development Savings Plan developed by St. Chris would allow low income people to save without becoming ineligible for government subsidized programs when they cash in their savings. Thus far, the agency has presented the idea to federal officials and undertaken a lot of work to educate low-income people about problems associated with RRSPs.

Meanwhile, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation has gone beyond its original role as funder of the CUSP program and become a committed source of encouragement and support. When St. Chris became frustrated with the lack of government action on income security issues, the Foundation suggested that the agency seek out a broader constituency for collaboration. St. Christopher House approached the Toronto City Summit Alliance (TCSA), which in turn brought high-profile business and labour organizations into a new group called the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults (MISWAA). Despite its rather cumbersome name, MISWAA has managed to focus substantial media attention on these issues and make them accessible beyond the realm of policy experts. The full Task Force Report is due in early 2006.

This fall, the Toronto Dominion bank published a report in the context of the MISWAA, strongly criticizing existing income supports for working-age people. "People were surprised to see a bank speak out," says Pigott. "That's the power of a broad-based coalition for reform."

The TD report was covered in all the major newspapers, and the *Toronto Star* published an excellent summary. See, "A Hand Up for the Working Poor," which is reprinted in this issue of *Perception*.

"The TD has been an amazing partner because they have taken the project seriously, and they have tremendous capacity," says Pigott.

Impressed by St. Christopher House's success with policy involvement, other social agencies have approached the organization to ask how they do it. Pigott tells them that "it is important to create some in-house capacity to link the experiences of program participants with social change initiatives. We have done this by setting up a special unit."

She doesn't disguise the fact that creating this capacity can be difficult, especially when there are so few sources of funding for this kind of work. It has to become a high priority for the organization and be supported with limited discretionary funds.

However, she also enumerates the many benefits that active policy involvement has brought to the constituency of St. Christopher House: many more people are now getting money for which they are eligible; staff, volunteers and program participants have opportunities to learn about public policy and to be proactive – and there is at least some hope that, some day, governments will address income security issues in a more effective way.

She hopes other organizations will not shy away from the path of policy advocacy. "As a sector, we need to regain our capacity to engage in public policy from the ground up," Pigott says.

A helping hand up for the working poor

Our system doesn't do enough to guard against the risk of people falling into a low-income trap, say economists ***Don Drummond*** *and* ***Gillian Manning***

It's time for a new set of social policies for low-income, working-age adults in Canada. Over the last 20 years, governments in this country have focused on shoring up the financial security of children and senior citizens, and they've made great strides on both fronts. But in the process, there's been a steady erosion in income support for the working-age population.

In the face of an increasingly challenging labour market environment, characterized by stagnant wages and a rise in low-paid temporary work, the number of adults covered by Canada's Employment Insurance program has declined, leaving people with fewer resources to fall back on when they lose their jobs.

No one has been harder hit than those forced onto social assistance, after a decade of cuts to welfare delivered by provincial governments intent on trimming deficits. The result is a system that doesn't do enough to guard against the risk of people falling into a low-income trap.

Instead of tinkering with this problem around the edges, new policies and programs are needed that do more to help adults become employed and gain economic independence. One element in such a framework would be a refundable tax credit for working-age adults.

Unlike other tax credits that only reduce an individual's tax liability to zero, refundable credits put money back into people's pockets. A form of negative income tax, they generate a payment when people's income falls below a certain threshold – not unlike the GST credit. A measure like this would help alleviate the problem of poverty at the broadest level, by establishing a more substantial income floor for all low-income adults, whether they're in the workforce or not.

A good complement to this – something that would zero in on the specific goal of getting more adults into the labour force – would be a working-income supplement. These supplements kick in once people have established a moderate attachment to the workforce, then increase with their earnings to a predetermined level, before tapering off. Supplements like these address cases of labour market failure, where wages are too low or hours of work insufficient to generate an adequate income. They promote employment by giving people an incentive to keep working at income levels that might otherwise tempt them to substitute welfare for work because they can't make ends meet on their take-home pay.

In addition to shoring up their after-tax incomes, the working poor also need help with other things: access to affordable child care, subsidized housing, and health and dental benefits.

In September, TD Bank Financial Group put out a report in which we measured the barriers that welfare recipients face when they try to make the transition from social assistance into the labour force. We found the single biggest barrier is often the prospective loss of non-cash benefits – above all, prescription drug and dental coverage for children, and earnings exemptions for parents who need help covering the cost of

We found the single biggest barrier is often the prospective loss of non-cash benefits – above all, prescription drug and dental coverage for children, and earnings exemptions for parents who need help covering the cost of child care.

child care. When welfare is the only program providing this kind of assistance, it creates a terrible dilemma for low-income adults who want to work – but not at the price of compromising their children's health.

Within the welfare system, some effort should be made to raise current draconian limits on assets. This would help lower another major barrier to work by giving people more room to build up the kind of savings that would make abandoning welfare benefits a more viable option.

Finally, we need to do more to help jobless people return to the labour force before their skills deteriorate. The main program in place to do that today – EI and its related training – covers a steadily shrinking share of the unemployed population. Part of this is due to reforms to EI implemented in the 1990s, which probably went too far in raising hours-of-work requirements, particularly in areas with high unemployment rates.

But, equally important, are changes in the composition of the labour force, which the present EI system is ill-equipped to deal with. An increase in self-employment, and a growing number of immigrants – two groups which would have been ineligible for EI even prior to the 1990s rule changes – are cases in point. We should look to develop related, independent programs to ensure that people who aren't eligible for direct unemployment insurance don't lose out on related services, like skills development and training.

The social and economic arguments for tackling these problems are compelling. The challenges posed by an aging population make it imperative that no efforts be spared in bringing all adults who can work into the labour force as soon as possible. And while this is true in every jurisdiction across Canada, it has particular resonance in Ontario, where changes in the way in which income security programs are funded and delivered mean that municipal governments will face a serious financial crunch during the next economic downturn.

We can't afford to delay any longer. The time for action is now.

This article first appeared in the Toronto Star, *Sept. 14, 2005. It is reprinted here with their permission.*

The World We Have:
Towards a New Social Architecture

The following article summarizes a paper by Katherine Scott, CCSD's Vice President of Research, in the New Social Architecture Series. This series of papers provides research, analysis and ideas to stimulate dialogue among Canadians. Raising Our Sights: The World We Want, *to be released in 2006, will carry these discussions further by exploring new social policy options for Canada in the new century.*

The world we have today is very different from the Canada that existed in the middle of the last century. Our current social policies and programs, however, are based on assumptions about economic and social conditions that date back several decades, and they no longer reflect the nation as it is. We need a new model – a new social architecture – to sustain us into the future.

To begin to build a new model, we need to understand how our world has changed since Canada embarked on a period of social innovation in the mid-20th century. At that time, new investments were made in education and health care, and new social protections were established to mitigate the risks associated with unemployment, illness, and old age. These social institutions make up what is widely known as the "welfare state."

Families have changed in many ways

The conventional nuclear family of the 1950s and 1960s included two parents with the father as the financial provider and the mother as unpaid caregiver, several children, and perhaps an elderly relative. Today, that scenario describes a declining share of Canadian families. While couple households still predominate, the proportion of working-age couples without children has increased, and a growing number of people live in one-person households; in fact, they made up fully one-quarter (25.7%) of all households in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2002a).

Marriages are less stable today, with four of 10 ending in divorce. More couples live in common-law relationships than in the past, and with re-marriages, there are more complex households and kin relationships.

Lone parents now make up one-quarter of all families with children, compared to just over one-tenth of families in 1961. And we know that single-earner and lone-parent households – predominantly mother-led – have a higher vulnerability to poverty.

New immigrants are not getting ahead

Immigrants today make up almost one-fifth of Canada's total population, close to half of Toronto's population, and one-third of Vancouver's. In the past, immigrants typically experienced a period of low income upon their arrival in Canada, but they economically outperformed Canadian-born citizens over the medium to long term. That trend has changed. Immigrants in the 1990s have been more highly educated than the Canadian average, but they have had great difficulty breaking into the labour market and making financial gains (Jackson and Smith, 2002; Picot and Hou, 2003).

The changing racial mix of immigrants has also played a role. In 2000, almost half of recent immigrants from Africa and East Asia were poor. Visible minority workers, including those born in Canada, have not done well in the job market compared to similarly skilled Canadian workers (Picot, 2004; Aydemir and Skuterud,

2003), and undervaluing of foreign education, training and work experience has thwarted the economic progress of many immigrants.

Yet all of Canada's future labour force growth will come from immigration. High rates of poverty among immigrants, now concentrated in our big cities, are a serious and growing national problem.

Youth are postponing careers and families

The transition to adulthood and economic independence is taking longer. About half of all young people now enter some form of post-secondary education, and most career ladders require post-graduate qualifications. This higher education may strengthen career prospects, but longer schooling means young adults have less job experience by age 30, and as a result, comparatively lower wage levels and acquired wealth (Morissette, 2002). In fact, younger workers are overrepresented among the unemployed and those in precarious employment.[1]

Young people are also delaying marriage and families. In 2001, 58% of young adults aged 20 to 24 were still living with their parents, up from 42% in 1981. Even among those aged 25 to 29, almost one-quarter (24%) lived in the parental home in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2002a). This generation is having fewer children and having them later.

Canada's population is aging

Our population is aging because of a low fertility rate and increased life expectancy. In 1961, Canada's fertility rate was 3.8; by 2002, it was less than half that, at 1.5. In addition, we have more senior citizens: in 2001, 13% of Canadians were aged 65 or older, and within a decade, the first wave of baby-boomers will reach 65. Moreover, the group aged 80+ is growing faster than the elderly population in general. Canada's capacity to deal with the resulting health and long-term care issues is in doubt – both in terms of future costs and providing care services, as the pool of informal caregivers (elderly wives, daughters, daughters-in-law) dwindles.

Women's workforce participation has doubled

Since the early 1960s, women's labour force participation rate has doubled from 30% to 60%, and it is even higher among mothers of young children – 66% of mothers with children under age 3 were in labour force in 2001.

High levels of employment for both women and men are needed to maintain the size of the workforce in periods of low fertility and to sustain economic prosperity going forward. Obviously two jobs provide a higher standard of living for families and better protection from a loss of income from unemployment.

But despite their economic contributions, women still carry most of the burdens of household work. Governments in Canada, with the notable exception of Quebec, have done relatively little to help families with their caregiving roles, and access to parental and family leave is limited.

Our low-wage economy has increasingly precarious employment

Canada stands out as a low-wage country among advanced industrialized nations. In the mid-1990s, about one in four full-time workers in Canada (23.7%) was low paid – earning less than two-thirds of the median national full-time wage – compared to just one in 20 workers (5.2%) in Sweden and only one in eight workers in Germany (OECD, 1996b). And one of every three Canadian women workers is low paid.

Unfortunately, most adult low-paid workers – particularly women and those with low levels of education – remain low paid over time (Drolet and Morissette, 1998; Finnie, 2000; Beach, Finnie and Gray, 2003; Janz, 2004). Many working-poor families cycle into and out of poverty as they find, or fail to find, enough weeks of work at decent wages. Today, a two-adult family with children must put in about 75 weeks of work a year at $10 per hour in order to rise above the poverty line (National Council of Welfare, 2004a).

Low-wage employment also brings higher risks of unemployment and limited access to non-wage benefits such as extended medical, dental, life and disability insurance (Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford, 2003). In 2000, only 13% of low-wage earners (below $10 an hour) had access to such non-wage benefits, compared to 51% of workers earning $10 to $20 per hour, and 77% of workers earning over $20 (Marshall, 2003). What's more, precarious

employment rarely includes the development of skills and capacities to help increase the worker's ability to find more stable work or move up a career ladder (Saunders, 2005: 12).

The non-profit/voluntary sector is under strain

Voluntary sector organizations play a vital role in every Canadian community. They provide a range of direct services and help establish connections among citizens, communities and governments. They build social capital and sustain democracy. Now, however, their unique contributions are threatened by a fiercely competitive funding environment and rigorous reporting requirements by funders, including governments (Scott, 2003). As well, low wages and poor working conditions for staff in the sector undermine organizations' capacity to pursue their missions (Saunders, 2004). Future capacity is also at risk because of the sector's aging support base – 28% of adults over age 15 account for the lion's share of volunteer time, charitable dollars and civic participation.

Income inequality is growing

After decades of relative stability, growing inequality among the working-age population has resulted from two broad forces: an increasing gap in market incomes and a decrease in the impact of income transfers.

Between 1989 and 2001, market incomes – overwhelmingly job earnings – of the bottom 40% of families fell in real terms. Market incomes of the middle 20% basically stood still, while the top 20% rose by 16.5%. Over that period, the share of market income going to the top 20% of families rose to 45.6% – at the expense of all other income groups.[2]

Income inequality after taxes and transfers has also been growing because cuts to transfers stopped them from playing their usual income-equalizing role. And wealth is even more unequally distributed than income. Young people with large student debts and young families with high mortgage debts are of particular concern.

Little progress on poverty among children and working-age households

In light of these developments, it is not surprising that Canada has made little headway in combating comparatively high poverty rates among children and working-age households. Child poverty was 10.2% in 2002, and among adults aged 18 to 64, it was 9.7%.

The depth of poverty has also increased, with falling social assistance incomes and a collapse of earned income among the working-poor (Picot, Morissette and Myles, 2003). Very low incomes, combined with high rental costs in many big cities, have produced a sharp rise in homelessness over the 1990s.

Social protections have been reduced

Canada entered a period of severe fiscal retrenchment in 1990s, accompanied by a shrinking of the federal role. While many other nations attacked government deficits, spending reductions by all levels of government in Canada were much more severe. Between 1992 and 2002, total Canadian government spending fell by 10 percentage points of GDP, compared to 4 points of GDP in the United Kingdom and 2 points in Italy, the only other OECD countries where program spending fell significantly.

Some of this decline was purely cyclical in nature – in 1992, Canada was in a deep recession – but some was engineered as part of deficit reduction, which included changes to Employment Insurance (EI) and the dismantling of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) and Established Programs Financing (EPF). Federal program spending (everything except debt service costs) fell from 15.7% of GDP in 1993/94 to an estimated 11.7% of GDP in 2003/04 (Department of Finance, November 2003) – the equivalent of almost $50 billion less in current spending.

Recent efforts to modernize and adapt

There have been some efforts to modernize social policies. Recent federal initiatives have involved some re-engagement in social services – child care and early childhood education, affordable housing – but funds are much more limited, and the federal role is much more modest.

Targeted, income-tested supports, notably the National Child Benefit, have been introduced, with a phase-out as incomes rise. Child benefit levels have increased over several years, and the reform of parental benefits and the introduction of a limited caregiver benefit program have also been important family-friendly initiatives.

To varying degrees, provincial governments have also invested in children's services, particularly for lower-income families. Quebec has developed exemplary child care and other early investment services. In fact, their $7-a-day child care system has inspired current efforts to build a pan-Canadian child care program.

Canada has major strengths – and challenges

Although there are many challenges, we have important strengths:

- Canada is culturally and economically richer for our growing cultural, racial and linguistic diversity.
- The Canadian economy has produced employment at a healthy rate – 2.5 million jobs between 1993 and 2002.
- Our youth are among the best educated in the world.
- The poverty rate among seniors is among the lowest in the world.
- The high workforce participation rate among women is buffering family incomes and contributing to greater gender equality.

It's time to rethink our social architecture

Economic and demographic changes have resulted in new divisions between the young and the old, Canadian-born and immigrants, the highly educated and poorly educated, single-earner and dual-earner households. While the welfare state is not withering away, it is not addressing these inequalities. We are running hard to stand still.

Our current social welfare mix of market, state, family and community is ill-equipped to address today's challenges, and long-term structural problems are unlikely to correct themselves. We need new ideas.

And the timing is right. If we fail to act, we risk more social and economic polarization, the entrenchment of a marginalized underclass, and declining social and economic prosperity and well-being.

Let's set our sights high

Many other nations are also struggling to address challenges to their systems of social protection while aspiring to be more innovative and competitive in the global economy. A productive and growing economy is essential, but it is not sufficient. Providing for human needs – the basic rights of citizens in liberal democracies – is a precondition for effective choice in the pursuit of life and happiness (Osberg, 2001).

Although some economists argue that there is an inevitable trade-off between more equality and economic growth, there are countries that performed well in terms of economic growth and low unemployment in the 1990s, while combining high levels of quality employment with low levels of poverty, inequality and insecurity (Jackson, 2000b; Auer, 2000; ILO, 2003). Their success seems to involve an intelligent redesign of social programs to balance security and job creation needs, high levels of social investments in early childhood, education and training, co-operative business-labour relations, an investment-friendly climate, and social consensus on the desirability of a relatively equal and inclusive society.

In order to create a more productive, equitable and inclusive Canada, we must seek the best balance of strategies for quality employment and adequate income security, and look at ways to address the caring needs of families and support the vitality of neighbourhoods and communities.

We must engage citizens and decision-makers in a creative and constructive dialogue about the world we have and the world we want for ourselves and our children.

The full text of the report *The World We Have* and other papers in CCSD's New Social Architecture series are available on the Council's website at www.ccsd.ca/pi.htm.

[1] Precarious employment generally includes temporary jobs, involuntary part-time work, low-income self-employment, and full-time work that is frequently interrupted by periods of unemployment.

[2] Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, for economic families of two or more persons.

Rebuilding Social Programs

by Ben Carniol

For the past three decades, frontline workers in social services were told that "welfare reform," "rationalization," and "redesign" meant improvements to social programs. That message was often accepted by those of us employed as frontline workers, policy developers, administrators or educators. After all, was it not the job of government to protect the public interest?

But as we moved through these decades of change, we faced two disturbing challenges.

1. The increasing incidence of hunger and homelessness in Canada pushed us to recognize that despite the rhetoric about improvements in social programs, the opposite was happening. Social programs were being gutted.
2. The evidence increasingly suggested that major policy decisions were being shaped by very powerful special interest groups, such as the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. This group, along with other big business lobbyists, successfully pressured to have tax cuts become a key feature of government policy.

From 1996 to 2004, Canadian tax cuts have cumulatively sucked almost $250 billion out of the public sector. With less public revenues, it was inevitable that public sector programs – ranging from education, to health care, to social services – would be drastically cut. Now, facing a federal election, we are hearing about a further round of tax cuts.

I would suggest that after years of dealing with the fiscal deficit, it is time to focus on the mounting social and democratic deficits. There are steps that we can take to bring the public interest up to the top of policy agendas.

Clarify progressive values for social policy development

Progressive values include support for universal access to public services, fair taxation, fair trade, and human rights. The better we articulate these values, the more we can differentiate them from the harmful ideologies of individualism, greed, illegitimate privilege, and militarism that, together, have seriously damaged our social safety net.

Seek an infusion of democracy within public and private sectors

In Canada, we follow the model of representative democracy. While this is a significant step to full democracy, this model produces an ominous gap between elected officials and the people they represent. Typically, this gap is filled by pressure groups from the most privileged sectors, which tilts public policy in their favour. We could learn from municipalities within countries such as Brazil, which are recognizing the deficiency of this model and implementing more participatory forms of democracy. The results have been impressive, as local communities not only engage in consultative processes, but also share power with elected officials about allocation priorities, and at times, how these priorities are to be carried out.

These forms of participatory democracy should be applied in Canada at all levels of government. The intent would be to make both politicians and bureaucrats far more accountable to the community. But expanding democracy should not be limited to government. It should be extended to the private sector, too, in order to acknowledge their enormous impact on the public. Yet today, corporate power is largely unaccountable to the communities they impact.

When business groups lobby for tax cuts that destroy our social safety net, they trample on community well-being. Inserting a measure of democratic participation into the governance of corporations could begin to address this issue. Granted this is a controversial concept. But in a democracy, such options need to be debated. And the outcome cannot be vetoed by the privileged.

Set in place more effective legal instruments

These innovations in community accountability will need to be supplemented by stronger legal protections against systemic prejudices and unjust practices that have disempowered diverse populations. Some of that groundwork has already been done. Almost 40 years ago, Canada signed the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It was ratified in 1976, yet we have done precious little to implement it in this country.

Work together

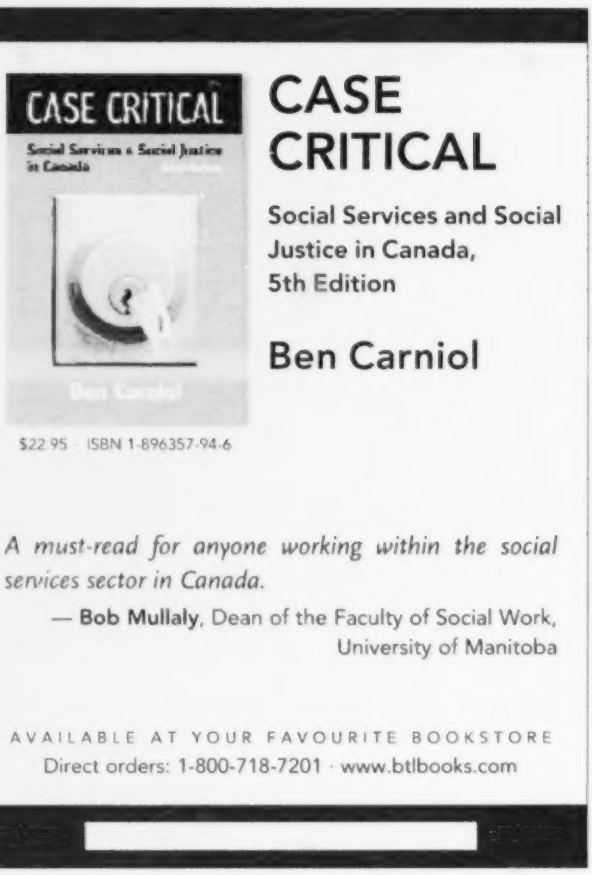
First Nations people, environmentalists, labour unions, feminists, sexual minorities, racialized communities, people with disabilities, older adults, anti-poverty groups, human rights activists, and various faith communities have many goals in common. Once we learn respect for cultural and other differences, we can form coalitions and seek support from inside mainstream organizations. My experience suggests that we can work well together if we make known our commitment to equity, and if we are open to learning how we can act as allies.

Taking these steps has become all the more important as campaigns for further tax cuts are being led by business groups like the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. This powerful consortium represents 150 of Canada's biggest corporations, with assets totalling over $2.3 trillion. If government agrees to their demands, social programs will shrivel further, high-income individuals will get richer, and other Canadians will be impoverished.

By articulating our values, mobilizing to create more participatory democracy, entrenching legal protections against systemic prejudices, and working in coalitions we *can* reverse these trends and move towards equity.

The challenge is great. So let's get on with it.

Ben Carniol is author of Case Critical: Social Services and Social Justice in Canada, *now in its 5th edition, published by Between the Lines in 2005. He is Professor Emeritus at the School of Social Work, Ryerson University (Toronto) where he co-ordinates the delivery of social work education to off-campus Aboriginal students, in partnership with the First Nations Technical Institute.*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